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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5344
INFO RUCPDOG/USDOC WASHDC
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0587
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 9863
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE 5657
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 3126
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 7378
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 5109
RUEANHA/FAA NATIONAL HQ WASHDC

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STATE PASS TO USTR FOR AUSTR HARTWICK

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SUBJECT: MALDIVES: AMBASSADOR ADVOCATES BOEING AND WINDPOWER SALES

REF: A) COLOMBO 135 B) 2006 COLOMBO 1609

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Ambassador Blake advocated for the purchase of Boeing aircraft by a Maldivian airline and the expansion of an upcoming wind power pilot project utilizing US-made wind turbines during his January 16 visit to the Maldives. Either of these sales could significantly boost US exports to the Maldives. End Summary.

A 737 Could Lead to More Boeing Sales

¶2. (U) During his January 16 visit to Male' (Ref A), Ambassador met with Abdul Haris, a representative of the Maldives government-owned air carrier Island Aviation Services (IAS), which is considering purchasing new aircraft. Haris said that IAS, currently the sole domestic airline and ground handling and cargo agent for Male' airport, is planning to begin flying international routes to Trivandrum, India; Colombo, Sri Lanka; and Dhaka, Bangladesh. IAS is considering purchasing a used 737 or a comparable Airbus. The Ambassador urged Haris to buy Boeing planes, noting Boeing is opening a large service center in India that IAS can utilize. Haris replied that cost was likely the deciding factor between a Boeing and an Airbus. Haris had previously told EconOff that he personally leaned toward Boeing, because he had visited Boeing in Seattle during a 2005 International Visitor Program and believed Boeing planes were cheaper to maintain. Haris also mentioned Maldives' need for training in aviation-related fields. The Ambassador encouraged Haris to contact the Federal Aviation Agency to learn more about its capacity-building programs.

¶3. (U) Note: Island Aviation may be in the market for more airplanes in the future, as it begins to compete with the foreign carriers currently bringing in the 600,000 tourists who visit Maldives resorts annually. End note.

SouthWest Windpower Project Could Reach USD85 Million

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador also met with Ahmed Abdullah, the Minister of Energy, Environment and Water, who was gravely concerned about the effects of climate change on Maldives. The Ambassador noted that Maldives had the opportunity to set an example in the field of clean, renewable energy, adding that he had noticed solar panels in some areas already. The Ambassador noted that American firm

SouthWest Windpower was currently finalizing a pilot windpower project in the Maldives. Ambassador urged Abdullah to consider a joint venture with SouthWest to expand the project if the pilot went well. Abdullah agreed that it would be beneficial and said he would follow up on the project. Minister Abdullah also said his ministry had a strong need for trained staff and sought educational opportunities for Maldivians in the U.S., which the Ambassador promised to promote.

15. (U) Note: SouthWest Windpower was an exhibitor at the latest US Pavilion at the Maldives Hotel and Trade Show (Ref B), funded in part through BFIF funding. SouthWest's USD2.5 million pilot project on three islands includes a feasibility study and detailed scoping study. If the project proves viable, SouthWest seeks to expand it to 100 islands, involving a USD85 million investment, with Ex-Im already committed to provide a loan guarantee. End note.

Comment

16. (U) Either of these sales would exceed the usual USD10-20 million level of annual US exports to the Maldives. Post will continue to pursue these commercial opportunities and seek other good opportunities for US exports. Additionally, in response to Maldives government officials' frequent requests for more university and professional training opportunities in the US, Post is developing several programs to improve US education links with Maldives.

BLAKE